

Polish Identity in Rural England.

Submitted by Kirstie Louise Bowden, to the University of Exeter as a thesis
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ABSTRACT

With Polish accession to the European Union in 2004 came an unprecedented wave of Polish migration to England. Marking it apart from previous waves of migration which settled in urban areas, this wave settled across the settlement hierarchy, resultantly described as geographically “ubiquitous” by Bauere et al (2007). This thesis takes as its inspiration a triad of influences; this migration wave; what the author deems seminal texts in rural geography (Philo 1992, Askins 2009, Panelli et al 2009); and personal circumstance (living in a rural area receiving Polish migrants for the first time) to chart that postulated as a lacuna (Burrell 2009); a study of the ways in which post-accession Polish identity is played out in rural areas. Wanting to focus on life in rural England as a whole rather than one specific strand, this thesis is by necessity broad, incorporating a number of strands of enquiry; the media migrant worker moral panic, community relations, Polish focussed service responses to Polish migration, and schemes delivered to the rural host population which aim to improve their encounters with migrant populations. What binds these themes together is the notion of hospitality, considering whether it is being extended or withheld, the reasons upon which such acts are predicated and the outcome upon those involved.

The thesis concludes that this grand wave of migration has rendered rural areas a thirdspace of possibility in both a physical (via service imprinting on the landscape) and social (via the forging of transnational friendships and in some instances, both Polish and migrant, hybridised identities) sense. It is postulated that the psychogeographies upon which relations are predicated – of which there are many, subtly nuanced and dependent upon the experiences of the individual - are in a state of flux and subject to revision with the passing of time, as are processes of hospitality extension (or indeed withholding). It is my belief that in detailing moments of hopeful engagement alongside moments of deep despair and reflecting upon their impacts upon identity, this thesis has heeded Askins (2005:53) call to embrace transrurality – a conceptualisation “that *both* encapsulates the specificities of place *and* is open to mobility and desire in order to displace rural England as only an exclusionary white space” and reposition it within transitional social imaginaries.

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